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OPERATIONS OF THE VII CORPS, 1ST U. S. ARMY
IN THE LANDING ON UTAH BEACH, NORMANDY, FRANCE,
6 - 7 JUNE 1944
(NORMANDY CAMPAIGN)
(Personal Experience of a Corps Liaison Officer)

Type of operation described: ESTABLISHMENT OF A CORPS
BEACHHEAD BY AMPHIBIOUS AND AIRBORNE ASSAULT

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ORIENTATION

INTRODUCTION

This monograph covers the operations of the VII Corps, 1st U. S. Army in the landing on Utah Beach, Normandy, France, from 6 to 7 June 1944.

For the purpose of orientation, the readers attention is directed to a few of the far reaching and decisive conferences held by the Allied Chiefs of Staff which brought about this operation.

By the month of May 1941, the top Military and Political leaders of America had decided upon a basic war plan -- to defeat Germany first. (1)

This was followed by a series of conferences and military decisions that gradually brought about the final directive to invade Europe.

Thus at Cassablanca, the Allies in January 1943, reached the decision to launch operation "OVERLORD" in May 1944. (2)

Up to this time however, a Supreme Commander had not been appointed, but until such time presented itself, an organization known as "COSSAC" was placed in operation on the basic plan. This group was organized under the British General Morgan, who had been appointed Chief of Staff to the Supreme Allied Commander (designate). (3)

(1) A-5, p. 4

(2) A-3, p. 1; A-4, p. 3; A-5, p. 211

(3) A-3, p. 1; A-4, p. 3; A-5, p. 42

It was also realized at this time that air supremacy was necessary for the contemplated invasion. The struggle for this supremacy had been going on since the war had started. It was however, to be intensified by the issuing of a new directive entitled "POINTBLANK". This order came out in January 1943, with the result that enemy air power was subjugated by the spring of 1944. (4)

At last in July 1943, the basic plan for "OVERLORD" was completed and ready for approval. One month later in August 1943, at the Quebec Conference, it was approved and the operational date was set for 1 May 1944. (5)

In December 1943, General Eisenhower had been appointed Supreme Commander and in February 1944, SHAEF came into being. (6) Under this set up, 21st Army Group commanded by General Montgomery and composed of the British Second Army and the U. S. First Army, was assigned to SHAEF. (7)

In February 1944, it was decided to postpone the invasion until 31 May 1944. This delay was caused by an increase in the landing forces and an enlargement of the landing areas. The weather, tidal and light conditions further deferred the landing date to the first week in June 1944. (8)

This set back proved to be a very favorable one. The first week of June 1944, saw the fall of ROME, the CRIMEA was cleared and the Germans were predicting a major Russian offensive. (9)

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- (4) A-3, p. viii; A-4, p. 3
(5) A-3, p. 1; A-5, p. 12
(6) A-3, p. 3; A-5, p. 41-42
(7) A-3, p. 3; A-5, p. 44
(8) A-3, p. 5; A-5, p. 52
(9) A-3, p. 6

ALLIED

The overall plan of attack involved an assault on beaches between CAEN and ^{N.S.}VARREVILLE. The initial objectives were: CAEN, BAYEUX, ISIGNY and CARENTAN, including sites for air bases. The final and most important of all was the capture of the port of CHERBOURG. (See Map A)

The assault forces for the Americans were organized under the code names "U" and "O" for UTAH and OMAHA. The British were assigned the letters "S", "J" and "G" for Sword, Juno and Gold. (See Map A) (10)

Mention is made at this time of the fact that the original plan did not include landing beaches on the east COTENTIN and that security necessitated a restriction on the number of persons having knowledge of the locations of specific landing areas. Thus the enlargement of the landing beaches and other changes in the plan called for a new code word "NEPTUNE", being assigned for this operation.

The main objective however of "NEPTUNE", was generally the same as "OVERLORD" -- to secure a lodgement area, including airfield sites and the capture of CHERBOURG as a base for future operations. (11)

The enlargement of the landing areas caused the addition of another town as one of the initial objectives, namely STE. MERE-EGLISE.

As the plan now stood, the D-Day objectives were the towns of CAEN, BAYEUX, ISIGNY, CARENTAN, and STE. MERE-EGLISE.

The "NEPTUNE" plan defined the mission of First Army,

(10) A-3, p. 6, 9; A-4, p. 33; Personal knowledge

(11) A-1, p. 1; A-2, p. 16; A-4, p. 20-21;
Personal knowledge

under General Bradley, to assault and secure the OMAHA and UTAH beaches. (See Map A) (12)

OMAHA beach was to be developed southward toward ST. LO along with the British on the left flank. Under General Gerow, this was the mission of V Corps.

UTAH beach was to be developed to the west and north and to capture the port of CHERBOURG. The VII Corps under General Collins was assigned this mission. (See Map A) (13)

ENEMY

The overall commander in France and the Low Countries was Field Marshal Von Rundstedt. At the time of the invasion he had some 60 divisions divided into two Army Groups. Under Field Marshal Rommel, Army Group "B" and under General Blaskowitz, Army Group "G". (14)

Deployed along the intended invasion coast was Army Group "B", composed of the Fifteenth and Seventh Armies. The Fifteenth was concentrated in the general area of PAS-DE-CALAIS, while the Seventh was charged with the defense of the COTENTIN PENINSULA. (See Map A) (15)

For quite some time our intelligence had known that the enemy strength on the peninsula consisted of at least two infantry divisions. These being the 709th, along the eastern half including the high ground about the city of CHERBOURG and running south but not including CARENTAN. The 243d was deployed to the west in rear of the 709th for the defense of the western half of the peninsula. (See Map B) (16)

(12) A-2, p. 22; A-3, p. 6; Personal knowledge

(13) A-3, p. 6-7; Personal knowledge

(14) A-4, p. 24; A-5, p. 66-67

(15) A-1, p. 6; A-3, p. 13; Personal knowledge

(16) A-1, p. 6; Personal knowledge

About ten days before the invasion was to take place, intelligence reports indicated some changes in the enemy dispositions and the appearance of a new unit on the VII Corps front. The 91st Division had moved in between the 709th and the 243d, thus the defense from VALOGNES to CARENTAN had been increased in depth. (See Map B) (17)

This change was the result of a difference of opinion between Rommel and Von Rundstedt on the concept of defending the beaches. Rommel wanted to stop any invasion at the beaches, or if possible before a landing could be made. On the other hand Von Rundstedt favored a covering force on the beach, with a close in tactical reserve and a counterattacking force in rear. A compromise was made and the result was the movement of the 91st as mentioned above. (18)

Based upon these reports, the enemy was now estimated as being able to (1) maintain a rigid defense of the beaches with the 709th; (2) reinforce the assault area with the 243d at H-Hour; (3) piecemeal counterattacks with at least four battalions on D-Day; and (4) a coordinated counterattack with armor after D plus 2. (19)

TERRAIN

The COTENTIN is the seaward portion of the larger CHERBOURG PENINSULA. The important feature on the land mass is the DOUVE RIVER, with its main tributary, the MERDERET. This body of water drains the major portion of the land and runs generally south and east to the sea. (See Map B) (20)

(17) A-1, p. 6-7; A-4, p. 27; Personal knowledge

(18) A-4, p. 28; A-5, p. 74-75

(19) A-1, p. 6

(20) A-1, p. 3; A-2, p. 124; Personal knowledge

High ground is around CHERBOURG in the north, the southern portion descends to a low marshy coastal plain which extends from VALOGNES to CARENTAN. (See Map B)

A series of locks and a dam just northeast of CARENTAN controlled the drainage of these bottom lands. This fact plus the undrained swamp lands, restricted movement of traffic to the established routes. (See Map B)

A study of the map discloses only two major routes open for this traffic when such a condition exists. These are (1) CARENTAN and PONT-L-ABBE on the east and (2) ST.-LO-D-OURVILLE and ST.-SAUVEUR-DE-PIERRE-PONT on the west. (See Map B) (21)

Thus the critical areas were (1) CARENTAN with its locks; (2) the dry ground at OURVILLE, PIERRE-PONT and (3) the inundated area to the east. (See Map B) (22)

The VII Corps landing area was just east of STE. MERE-EGLISE. The beach was composed of compact, smooth sand and of a shallow gradient between high and low tides.

Unlike OMAHA, there was no dominating ground to seize and hold. Along the beach was a masonry wall for about 10,000 yards, almost vertical and from 4 to 8 feet high. In many places sand was piled against it forming a ramp on the seaward side. At the top was a wire fence and existing roads running down to the beach terminated with gaps in this wall, but blocked by the enemy.

Behind the wall were sand dunes, from 10 to 20 feet in height and extending inland for about 150 to 1000 yards. Beyond these the inundated areas extended westward, the banks of which could be easily defended by the enemy. (23)

(21) A-1, p. 3; A-4, p. 30; A-5, p. 90; Personal knowledge
(22) A-1, p. 3; Personal knowledge
(23) A-1, p. 4; Personal knowledge

Along the seaward side of the beach were obstacles from 50 to 150 yards out, consisting of piles, stakes, hedgehogs, etc. In most cases these were mined.

Immediately behind the wall there were pill boxes, underground shelters, tank turrets and firing trenches, the whole protected by wire, antitank ditches and mines. Strong points had interlocking fire and contained fixed and mobile artillery.

The natural obstacle of the inundated area resulted in the UTAH defenses not being as heavy as at OMAHA. Although several miles inland there were any number of artillery emplacements to cover the sea approaches and the beach area. (24)

WEATHER

As had been mentioned before, the invasion date had been put off several times and as fate would have it, the weather for June 1944, was the most unfavorable as far as sea and wind as had been experienced in the past 20 years.

D-Day had been set for 5 June and part of the force was already at sea, but had to put in to port to seek shelter. As a result of these conditions the invasion was again postponed for 24 hours.

LOGISTICAL SUPPORT

Supplies for U. S. Forces were under the control of First Army from D-Day to D plus 14.

Rations consisted of "C" and "K" from D-Day to D plus 3.

POL was based on 25 miles per day per vehicle for the first 14 days.

(24) A-1, p. 5-6; Personal knowledge

Ammunition was based on 7 units of fire until D plus 20.

It was expected to land some 20,000 vehicles and better than 176,000 personnel by D plus 1. (25)

FIRST U. S. ARMY PLAN

The general plan of the First Army called for a combined landing on two beaches, by two Corps within 30 minutes of each other, starting at 0630 hours on the right beach, VII Corps area.

VII Corps was to be assisted by the 1st Engineer Special Brigade in establishing a beachhead in the vicinity of VARREVILLE. (See Map B)

The immediate objectives of First Army were the capture of CHERBOURG and a drive toward ST.-LO to the south. (26)

VII CORPS SITUATION

The VII Corps commanded by General Collins, was loaded aboard ships so as to land in the order (1) 4th Division, (2) 90th Division and (3) 9th Division. The 4th Cavalry Group was to capture the islands of ST. MARCOUF. (See Map B) (27)

In the area of the VII Corps, the terrain was rather flat and there were no dominating ground features to be seized.

To the advantage of the VII Corps was the fact that, the actual landings touched down some 1500 yards south of the planned areas. This point of beach proved to be lightly defended as compared to the original beach. (28)

(25) A-2, p. 31-32; A-3, p. 11

(26) A-2, p. 26; A-4, p. 33; Personal knowledge

(27) A-1, p. 10; A-2, p. 43; Personal knowledge

(28) A-2, p. 46; Personal knowledge

VII CORPS PLAN

Field Order No. 1, 28 May read "VII Corps assaults UTAH beach on D-Day at H-Hour and captures CHERBOURG with minimum delay." (29)

Under this plan the 82d Airborne Division was to seize and hold the area in and around STE. MERE-EGLISE and to establish deep bridgeheads over the MERDERET RIVER and to be prepared to drive toward ST.-SAUVUER-LE-VICOMTE. (See Map B)

This same order assigned the 101st Airborne Division the mission of seizing the western exits of the roads across the inundated areas from the beach and taking up defensive positions on the north and south edges of the invasion area and to establish bridgeheads across the DOUVE RIVER for later drives toward CARENTAN and eventual link up with V Corps. (See Map B)

The 4th Division by this order was to assault UTAH beach at H-Hour and establish a beachhead and then drive on to CHERBOURG. (See Map B)

The 90th, 9th and 79th Divisions were to land on D plus 1, 4 and 8 in that order.

At H minus 2 hours the 4th Cavalry Group was to land on the islands of ST. MARCOUF. (See Map B)

Concentrated Air and Naval bombardments were to precede the landings. At about midnight of 5 June the RAF would bomb the beaches and just before H-Hour the Ninth Air Force to attack batteries in the UTAH area. At H minus 40 minutes Naval fire would undertake the enemy shore. As the assault waves came within 600 to 700 yards of the shore, rockets were to be discharged toward the beach. (30)

(29) A-1, p. 10; Personal knowledge

(30) A-1, p. 10, 12; A-2, p. 47; A-5, p. 93; Personal knowledge

PREPARATIONS FOR THE ASSAULT

In the long history of warfare, this assault caused a concentration of the largest force for war to be brought together for any one operation. As early as 1942 and in some cases earlier, the first stages of stock piling and the building up of manpower began on the tiny island of ENGLAND.

The Air Force and the Navy were very important at this point. The strategic bombing of Germany was reducing her aircraft production plants and robbing her of capacity production.

The Navy in addition to its normal duties in the ATLANTIC was engaged in channel training exercises for the assault.

As D-Day approached the interdiction of road, railroad and communication lines took on increasing importance. On D-Day some 70 bridges and tunnels were out of action. This entire program of bombing was carried out so as to deceive the enemy as to the true location of any assault area. (31)

In special assault training centers, troops and engineers practiced landings and the assaulting of various types of strong points and fortifications. The last of these exercises was held on 4 May. (32)

In the second week of May the assault forces began to assemble in the marshalling areas and on 1 and 2 June they moved to embarkation points.

As soon as the troops were aboard ship the Navy took control. Under the command of Rear Admiral Moon, Task Force "U" became responsible for the lift, protection at sea, fire support and breaching of under water obstacles. (33)

(31) A-1, p. 12; A-3, p. 14-16; A-4, p. 31-32

(32) A-1, p. 12; A-4, p. 35; Personal knowledge

(33) A-1, p. 13; A-2, p. 30; Personal knowledge

NARRATION

EVENTS PRECEDING H HOUR

The Naval Task Force for UTAH beach was composed of some 865 vessels, in 12 separate convoys. Because of the extent of this force, it was necessary to use 9 separate loading areas, since no one port was large enough to handle all the necessary traffic. Another result of this vast dispersion, was the fact that all vessels had to make a precise rendezvous before setting sail for the coast of France. (34)

As mentioned earlier, some sections had sailed before 5 June, but because of bad weather, had returned to port. On the morning of 5 June all sections again set out for the enemy shore and the second start got underway without too much confusion.

About 0200 hours 6 June, the USS Bayfield, headquarters ship for Task Force "U", had passed the Transport Area marker vessel. By 0229 hours, she was at anchor and followed by other control vessels which took their positions closer to the shore. H Hour was 0630. (35)

About 2145 hours 5 June, 20 pathfinder planes took off from England with the necessary crews to mark six drop zones and a glider landing zone. It was most unfortunate however, that the pathfinder operations were not entirely successful, due to enemy antiaircraft artillery and cloud formations.

The airborne elements of both the 82d and the 101st Airborne Divisions comprised 6 regiments, with normal artillery and engineers. This force amounted to over 13,000 men and re-

(34) A-1, p. 13; Personal knowledge

(35) A-1, p. 13; A-4, p. 58; Personal knowledge

quired about 925 C-47 planes. At a later hour on D Day and on D plus 1, some additional 4,000 infantry and their supporting elements, were to arrive by 500 gliders. The last elements of the divisions, were to come by water and land on D plus 1. This airborne operation was probably the most difficult of the whole invasion, a landing behind an enemy line at night and a full five hours before shore landings. (36)

AIRBORNE LANDINGS

82ND AIRBORNE DIVISION

The overall landing of the 82d was very bad, of the three regiments the 505th made the best landing. Despite this however, the division seized the east bank of the MERDERET in the vicinity of STE. MERE-EGLISE. All positions however, were not as fully occupied as had been expected according to the division plan. (37)

Initial missions of each regiment were as follows. The 505th to land east of the MERDERET, capture STE. MERE-EGLISE, seize and hold river crossings at LA-FIERE and CHEF-DU-PONT, and maintain positions to the north through NEUVILLE-AU-PLAIN, tying in with the 101st Division on the right. The 507th and 508th to land west of the river and consolidate their bridgeheads. The 507th to assist the 505th in securing the LA-FIERE bridge. The 508th to destroy the crossings of the DOUVE at LA-BASTILLE and PONT-L-ABBE. Both regiments to be prepared to push to the west, to a line along the DOUVE. (See Map C) (38)

The two major objectives then of the 82d, were the found-

(36) A-1, p. 14; A-2, p. 44
(37) A-1, p. 30; Personal knowledge
(38) A-1, p. 30; Personal knowledge

ing of a base for operations at STE. MERE-EGLISE and establishing the bridgeheads across the MERDERET. The latter operation did not succeed as had been expected and the action at STE. MERE-EGLISE assumed the most importance. (See Map C)

Tactically speaking, the STE. MERE-EGLISE actions were the most significant of all D Day for the 82d. This was the objective of the 505th Regiment. The 3d Battalion started at once for the town and the order was to use knives, bayonets and grenades only, so as to be able to tell the enemy by his fire.

By 0430 hours, the town had been seized and the unit had put up the same American flag it had flown over NAPLES. The enemy made several counterattacks during the day, but these were beaten off.

By 0930 hours, the communication lines to CHERBOURG had been cut, road blocks were in and except for snipers the town had been cleared. By nightfall the situation was well in hand. (See Map C) (39)

The 507th and 508th jumped on time, but without aid from the pathfinders due to the enemy actions. This resulted in both regiments going beyond the drop zones and a great number of men and large quantities of equipment landing in the marshes. (See Map C)

The two regiments were so widely scattered, that elements of the 508th were fighting with the 101st Division. (40)

The most important as far as the 82d was concerned were the two river bridges across the MERDERET. Here the bulk of the forces were committed and here the enemy put up his strongest resistance. It so happened that these groups landed almost on top of the headquarters of the German 91st Division.

(39) A-1, p. 31-34

(40) A-1, p. 37

A group of about 400 men from all the regiments launched an attack on the LA-FIERE bridge, but they could not consolidate their gains on the west bank. As a result, when the enemy counterattack came only a short time after they lost the bridge, and the elements on the west bank became isolated from the east side. (See Map C)

The enemy attack was pressed again in the afternoon, but the 82d held on. The east bank was reorganized and at about 2000 hours reinforcements arrived and by dark the defense was stabilized. (41)

Farther south at CHEF-DU-PONT, the attempt to seize that bridge was unsuccessful. However, our troops were able, late in the day to gain the west bank, but could go no further. (See Map C)

Although the actions of units at STE. MERE-EGLISE and the bridgeheads were the principal ones for D Day, it is known that numerous small units which had landed west of the MERDERET aided the overall actions. Some of these isolated groups fought for as long as four or five days before being able to link up. (42)

101ST AIRBORNE DIVISION,

In general the division did not have a good drop, but it was much better than the 82d. Some 1500 men and about 60 percent of the equipment were either killed, captured or lost in the swamps. Many of the initial missions were carried out by mixed groups. (43)

The wide dispersion although not good, did work to the general advantage of the division. The sudden appearance of

(41) A-1, p. 37-39

(42) A-1, p. 40; Personal knowledge

(43) A-1, p. 14-15; Personal knowledge

the Americans confused the Germans and although they fought by fire they did not seem to want to leave their positions to attack.

The plan of the 101st Division was the seizing of the four inland exits between ST.-MARTIN-DEE-VARREVILLE and POUPPEVILLE. In the south, it was to destroy the two bridges over the DOUVE River on the main road north of CARENTAN, as well as the railroad bridge. It was to seize the lock and establish bridgeheads over the DOUVE at LE-PORT north of CARENTAN. After being relieved by the 4th Division at the beachhead it was to seize CARENTAN and establish contact with V Corps and thereafter protect the southern flank of VII Corps. (See Map C) (44)

The seizing of the two northern exits was assigned the 502d, it was to drop just west of Exits 3 and 4. About seventy five men from this regiment took off for one of the main objectives, an enemy coastal battery near VARREVILLE, but found it deserted. Pushing east they secured the two exits, as other troops took up defensive positions to the north and to establish contact with the 82d. (See Map C) (45)

The capture of beach Exits 1 and 2 was the mission of the 506th. In addition, it was to defend a line along the DOUVE River, seizing the two bridges near its mouth at LE-PORT and establish a bridgehead for subsequent use and at the same time prepare to destroy them if necessary. (See Map C)

To carry out these missions, some eighty men from this unit made for Exits 1 and 2, attacking the Germans there, forcing them to surrender by noon. At about 1230 hours contact was

(44) A-1, p. 16-17; Personal knowledge

(45) A-1, p. 17-20

established with the 8th Infantry, 4th Division. (See Map C) (46)

It had been planned to drop the 501st just north of CARENTAN, in order to carry out the missions of destroying the highway bridges and securing the lock. (See Map C) (47)

In the south some fifty men attacked and seized the bridges at about 0500 hours and about one hundred fifty others captured the lock north of CARENTAN. When other units attempted to destroy the bridges on the main highway and the railroad, the enemy brought in intense high angle and small arms fire. The excellent use of Naval gun fire neutralized this enemy fire. (See Map C) (48)

By the end of the day some 2500 of the original 6600 men were now organized and working together. All missions, except destroying the highway and railroad bridges had been accomplished.

SEABORNE LANDING

4TH INFANTRY DIVISION

While the airborne troops were trying to assemble among the hedgerows and the marshes, the seaborne forces were getting ready to assault the shore. At about 0430 hours, the 4th and 24th Cavalry Squadrons landed on the islands of ST. MARCOUF. This suspected enemy location was found to be void of any enemy troops and the landing was completed by 0530 hours. (49)

At H minus 40 minutes Naval bombardment began firing on the enemy shore. This was followed in a few minutes by the bombing of the Ninth Air Force of the beach area. As assault

(46) A-1, p. 20-22

(47) A-1, p. 23-25

(48) A-1, p. 26-29

(49) A-1, p. 43

craft came within 700 yards of the shore, the fire support group began to drench the landing area with fire.

The leading wave had some 20 LCVP craft, each carrying a 30 man assault team and 8 LCT craft carrying 4 amphibious tanks each. The second wave had some 32 LCVP craft and in addition to infantry troops, contained 8 Naval Demolition teams. The third and fourth waves brought in tanks and engineer combat troops.

At almost H Hour the leading wave touched the shore and the men moved into waist deep water for the last hundred yards to the beach. Aside from a few enemy artillery bursts, there was no real opposition at H Hour. (50)

The actual landings did not take place at the planned areas, but almost 2000 yards to the south. (See Map C) As mentioned before, this worked to our advantage as the shore was not as thickly obstructed and the defenses not as formidable. (51)

The Army and Navy demolition groups that followed the assault wave found the beach less obstructed than had been expected. Due to this lack of expected obstacles the entire beach was cleared in little more than an hour.

The blowing of gaps in the sea wall and clearing paths through the sand dunes progressed rapidly. The infantry found enemy troops in field fortifications, but they were apparently dazed from the preparatory fires and offered little fight. (52)

By 0800 hours four battalions had landed and two more were ashore by 1000 hours. The leading regiment, the 8th, moved inland across the three southern causeways and advanced to the

(50) A-1, p. 43-44; Personal knowledge
(51) A-1, p. 45, 47; Personal knowledge
(52) A-1, p. 47-50; Personal knowledge

west to contact the airborne forces. By evening two of the battalions of the 4th were on the CARENTAN highway south of STE. MERE-EGLISE and the third was compressing the enemy pocket that separated the forces of the 82d in STE. MERE-EGLISE, from the balance of the Corps. (See Map C) (53)

The other two regiments of the 4th Division came ashore some time after the noon hour. The 12th had to wade through the inundated area south of Exit 3 and took up positions on the left of the 502d. (See Map C) The 22d also had to move through the swamps, but reached dry land near ST.-MARTIN-DE-VARREVILLE, and pushed north to take up positions on the left of the inundated area, near the 502d. (See Map C) (54)

The close of D Day saw our positions in fairly good shape. But it was not just one battle by a large combined force. There were some fifteen or twenty engagements in the airborne divisions alone. In general, the overall action was a success, as small units took advantage of the enemy's surprise.

The 82d held STE. MERE-EGLISE, had won and then lost the LA-FIERE bridge, had gained only the west bank at CHEF-DU-PONT and had large numbers of men isolated west of the MERDERET. The LA-FIERE bridge alone was to engage the most effort of the division for the next three days. (See Map D)

The 101st held the northern sector, the southern flank was weak, but they held the LE-PORT bridges and the lock to the west. At ST.-COME-DU-MONT the enemy held the 501st against the swamps and the rail and road bridges could not be taken. (See Map D)

The 4th, as mentioned above had its 8th Infantry east

(53) A-1, p. 50-53

(54) A-1, p. 53-54

and south of STE. MERE-EGLISE, while the 12th and 22d Regiments were to the northeast between STE. MERE-EGLISE and the inundated area. (See Map D)

Late in the afternoon an advance detachment of the VII Corps came ashore and at 1900 set up a CP near the 4th Division CP at LA-HUBERT. (55)

ACTIONS OF D PLUS 1

The morning of D plus 1, saw the elements of the 8th Infantry launch an attack on the enemy salient to the south of STE. MERE-EGLISE, with the objective of making contact with the 82d Division. It had no sooner contacted the 505th in the town when the enemy to the north launched an attack. A coordinated counterattack was planned by both units and by the end of the day the enemy was cleared from his positions. (See Map D) (56)

The actions at LA-FIERE and CHEF-DU-PONT had reached a stalemate. Several enemy counterattacks were beaten off but no gains were made by the 82d, and the isolated forces west of the river were to remain for several days more. (57)

On 7 June, the 12th Infantry attacked to the northwest and seized the high ground to the northeast of STE. MERE-EGLISE. About mid morning they again pressed an attack to the north and when stopped in the afternoon on the forward slopes of the high ground northeast of NEUVILLE-AU-PLAIN, they reorganized for the night. (See Map D) (58)

The 22d, on D plus 1 jumped off on an attack against the enemy's strongest inland positions so far, the coastal forts

(55) A-1, p. 41-42, 55-56; Personal knowledge
(56) A-1, p. 62-63
(57) A-1, p. 63
(58) A-1, p. 66

north of ST. MARCOUF. For several hours the regiment attempted to move forward, but enemy counterattacks drove them back to ODAINVILLE. The 3d Battalion, under steadily increasing enemy pressure was to continue the mission of clearing the beach fortifications as they moved north along the shore. (See Map D) (59)

The actions of the 101st Division throughout D plus 1 continued to be those of small units. The main effort was a preparation for attacking the bridges north of CARENTAN. To the east the 506th held the lock and the LE-PORT bridges.

By the night of D plus 1, VII Corps had a beachhead some 12,000 yards deep and the initial assault had succeeded. However elements of the 82d were still isolated west of the MERDERET. To the north and south the enemy still held strong positions, in the south at CARENTAN the area remained open. Enemy guns on the coast were still harassing the beach.

The failure of the 82d to establish a bridgehead over the MERDERET and the slow progress of the 4th brought about the first change in the VII Corps plan. Originally the 4th was to cross the MERDERET and then turn north to capture VALOGNES. Because of this slow progress the 4th would continue its present mission east of the MERDERET, while elements of the 82d would continue on the left flank of this northward drive. The balance of the 82d to continue in their efforts to establish the bridgehead. In the south the 101st ^{was to} continue to seize the causeways and approaches into CARENTAN. These objectives were to take almost a week for the VII Corps to accomplish. (See Map D) (60)

(59) A-1, p. 66-71

(60) A-1, p. 71-75; Personal knowledge

SUMMARY

At last the cry for a second front had been answered, we had proved to the world that we could defeat the enemy on his own ground. Further, we did to Germany what she had failed to do to England in 1941. The best in coordination and effort from all the services, air, navy, and ground was necessary in order to be successful. Room for improvement, yes, but the results of this venture proved that it was a success.

This success however was not easy. To use a base as close as England, it was necessary to assault this strongly defended coast. The terrain of France aided the movement of enemy troops and supplies, in addition to having one of the best communication systems to aid the enemy. Thus the four years of construction of the Atlantic wall, plus these other factors gave the enemy the advantage to defeat any attempt at invasion. The air superiority that we had obtained by the spring of 1944 overcame these disadvantages.

ANALYSIS AND CRITICISM

1. INTELLIGENCE

The thoroughness of the Allied intelligence enabled the planning of this operation to be extremely complete. It not only furnished an analysis of the terrain, and enemy dispositions, but the smallest details as to the defensive fortifications. This intelligence was also able to confuse the enemy as to the exact invasion areas. In fact no attempt was made to conceal the news that an invasion was to be made. In addition, the enemy at first could not be sure that once the landing had been

made, that it was the main effort, or if it was only a thrust to draw attention while the main attack would strike elsewhere. The above facts are proven by the results of the actual landings and in the confusion, how the enemy failed to move any sizeable reinforcements from other areas to meet this invasion.

2. ENEMY CONCEPT OF DEFENSE

The difference of opinion between or among higher commanders was a factor in the initial defeat of the enemy at the beaches. This was a sure lack of the unity of command, brought about by Hitler's mistrust of his staff. As a result the rigid defense at the coast left no forces immediately available for a possible counterattack. It was not until after the middle of July before the enemy moved any sizeable units from the Fifteenth Army area. This resulted in a more or less of a free hand for the Allies.

3. THE ATLANTIC WALL

The assumed idea that an invader would require a major port in order to operate and supply large numbers of troops and pieces of equipment was a faulty one. This resulted in harbors being given first priority for defense. At the same time the Nazi press was telling the world about the impregnability of this so called Atlantic Wall. The scarcity of troops to man this defense and the lack of mobility for counter-attacking was a weak factor, there was no defense in depth.

4. WEATHER

The condition of the seas and wind gave the enemy a false

sense of security. The bad weather and rough sea drove the enemy naval craft into their harbors. As a result most of the defending units were not expecting a landing at a time like this. At least it was generally thought that any such landing would be improbable.

5. AIR DROPS

It was most unfortunate that the airborne divisions had such unfavorable landings. This of course, was due almost to the fact that the pathfinder operations had failed in almost half of their marking missions. The enemy antiaircraft fire as well as cloud banks loosened formations and caused scattering of the planes. These widespread drops although of a serious nature as far as securing initial objectives was concerned, confused the enemy as well. Such wide spread landings hindered the corps mission, as seen from the fact that numerous groups remained isolated from four to five days.

6. ASSAULT LANDINGS

The results of training of the assaulting forces was clearly reflected, when upon landing at the wrong beach, they quickly reorganized and moved inland from their present positions. Of course, the fact must be taken into consideration that the proposed landing area was more extensively fortified than the one on which they did land. In any case the initiative of the leaders was clearly indicated at this point.

7. NAVAL GUNFIRE

Initially this fire was not as effective as had been expected. It had failed to knock out many of the shore defenses

and strong points. One big feature however was the long range support provided for ground forces once ashore. The shore fire control parties were used to advantage in several cases. Fire from destroyers close in was most effective on enemy strong points on the beaches.

LESSONS

1. It is admitted that a strong and well informed combat intelligence organization is necessary for any military operation to succeed.

2. The American concept of defense is proven by the results of this last war, it must have depth and a force available to counterattack.

3. Any so called static defense is no stronger than the manpower and weapons employed to hold it.

4. Weather is a part of intelligence and therefore, a part of planning and must always be taken into consideration in any type of operation.

5. (a) It is absolutely necessary that any units dropped from the air be placed upon the drop zone and further that pathfinder operations be carried out to the finest details for success.

(b) In this connection it is also necessary that Air Force personnel be trained in the delivery of such airborne units.

6. (a) The broad principles of troop leading and staff coordination as developed in the past are still sound.

(b) That a commanders estimate must take into consideration the effect of his actions on the mission of the higher commander.

7. The proper use of the Naval Shore Fire Control party

should be stressed at service schools in order to fully exploit their use as required.

8. It is admitted that one of the most important factors of success in combat is training.